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DAN SMOOT

PINKVILLE—PART II

On December 12, 1969, Army sources said the Army is investigating (in connection with the alleged My Lai massacre on March 16, 1968) 9 soldiers and 15 former soldiers — all of whom were members of Company C at the time of the event. Officials said they expected charges to be filed against most of the 24.[1]

To date, charges have been filed against two: First Lieutenant William L. Calley, Jr. (white), a platoon leader of Company C on the day of the My Lai fight; and Staff Sergeant David Mitchell (Negro), who was one of Calley's squad leaders. Calley is awaiting court martial on charges of premeditated murder of at least 109 civilians at My Lai on March 16, 1968 (and of one other civilian on another occasion). Mitchell is charged with intent to murder 30 Vietnamese civilians at My Lai.[2]

Do American servicemen at war ever kill harmless civilians? They do. As General William Tecumseh Sherman said — in a commentary on his own military action which cut a 60-mile-wide swath of desolation across the face of Georgia, leaving unarmed women, children, and old men to starve — war is hell.

Our armed forces killed thousands of harmless civilians in our bombing raids on German and Japanese cities during World War II. We have doubtless killed hundreds, possibly thousands, in our bombing and shelling of Vietnamese villages known to be hiding places for communist guerrillas.

All wars are hell. This one is more hellish than most.

In mid-December, 1969 (after the massacre story broke), an Associated Press reporter interviewed several U.S. Marines assigned to a platoon now operating in the My Lai area. Their mission is to protect residents of Song My village, while conducting self-help programs. They work alongside Vietnamese troops in the daytime, and, at night, run ambush patrols to keep the Viet Cong out of the area. PFC Robert Wolff summed up the attitude of all, saying:

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"We know . . . what it's like to live in fear of booby traps and with people who can be friendly one minute and VC the next."

PFC Len Nixon said:

"The people in the area treat you like dirt. We try to help them, and they in turn help the VC."[3]

Women and children in civilian garb fight with the Viet Cong in South Vietnam, and are among the most treacherous of all enemy personnel there.

There is, of course, a great deal of barbarism in our country, as in every other nation. Some of this is bound to be dredged up and brought into our armed forces by the dragnet of the draft. The draft has also swept into our armed forces some of the communists, pro-communists, and other America-hating militants who are trying to destroy our country. Some of these, as individuals, may be guilty of needless killing in Vietnam. In our armed forces there may be a few hoodlums who just like to kill. And perhaps harmless civilians have been shot by scared American boys who have learned that they must shoot first and look later. Such things happen because of the nature of wars in general, and of this war in particular.

But I have seen nothing which credibly indicates that there was at My Lai, or anywhere else, an organized massacre committed by a unit of American troops, under command.

There is much, however, to indicate that no such massacre occurred.

It is strange that no rumor of the alleged massacre by Company C ever circulated through the ranks of the Army. Soldiers from other units that worked closely with Charlie Company never heard of this event, though it was, allegedly, so horrible that it sickened some battle-hardened veterans who saw it.[4]

David Deverick (former sergeant in Company D, who worked closely with C Company in and around My Lai for several months) says:

"I think this whole story about a massacre is just unbelievable. Something like that if it were true would be almost impossible to hush up. We fought with those guys and drank beer and got drunk with them.

"I never heard a damn thing about what is in the papers now. As close as my men were to those in Charlie Company, we would have heard something about the shootings. I heard nothing on any level, not even a single rumor, that such a thing had happened."[5]

Men who had been silent for more than a year suddenly came forward to give eye-witness accounts of events which they had not mentioned before. Their names and the gory details they gave were reported under big headlines all over the world. They made expenses-paid trips across the country for television interviews broadcast to millions. Some sold their stories. Others seemed content to bask in the publicity, while someone else took the profit for marketing their accounts about the "massacre."

As pointed out last week, Seymour M. Hersh, new-left freelance writer, broke the My Lai story nationally by selling it to some 32 newspapers, just before the communist-planned November 15 moratorium demonstration in Washington.

Hersh and his new-left Dispatch News Service syndicating company arranged (reportedly for $10,000) a news interview on the CBS TV network, November 24, with Paul David Meadlo, formerly a private in Company C. Meadlo said Lieutenant Calley had ordered "about 370" villagers killed at My Lai. Meadlo said he himself (on orders from Calley) had fired 60 or 70 shots into a group of 40 to 45 civilians and may have killed 10 or 15 of them.[6]

Senator Ernest F. Hollings, criticizing CBS for this interview, said that Meadlo is "obviously sick" and that a man in his condition "ought not to be exposed to the entire public."

On November 25, 1969, Richard Pendleton, a former private in Company C, walked into the Richmond, California, *Independent* and said he did not like to see Lieutenant Calley getting all the blame. Pendleton said he saw Captain Ernest

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L. Medina, commander of Company C, shoot a small boy.

Captain Medina told newsmen:

"No, I did not shoot any child. . . . I did not order any massacre. . . . I did not see any massacre."[6]

In fact, this story about the Captain shooting a child has already been discredited; and Medina has sued a national magazine for $110 million.[7]

Medina admits he shot a woman in My Lai, though he did not know it was a woman until after he fired. After he shot her, he did not know whether he killed her but assumed he did. He never did know whether she was a Viet Cong, or an innocent civilian who happened to make a wrong move in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Anthony Broussard (corporal in Company C at the time of the My Lai fight) says *Time* magazine offered him $7000 and a sports car for an interview.[3]

Ronald L. Haeberle (now a civilian in Cleveland, formerly a sergeant in the Eleventh Infantry Brigade) went on the My Lai mission with Company C as a photographer. He took two sets of photographs: one in black and white for the Army, a set of color slides for himself.

On November 20, 1969, the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* published eight of Haeberle's "massacre" pictures, accompanying a story by Joseph Eszterhas, a *Plain Dealer* reporter. *Life* magazine paid $125,000 for Haeberle's photographs and Eszterhas's commentary.[4]

The pictures published in *Life* show about 15 Vietnamese bodies lying on a path; a man and a child dead along the road; the bodies of an adult and a child in a building doorway; American soldiers throwing something into a burning hut with bodies nearby.

One photograph shows an American soldier in a rice paddy firing a rifle, with about a dozen Vietnamese men, women, and children standing nearby looking frightened. The picture does not show what the soldier was firing at, but the caption says the group of frightened civilians was dead minutes later.

It is quite possible that the victims shown in Haeberle's photographs were slaughtered by the Viet Cong, not by Americans.

Former Sergeant Deverick says:

"I've yet to see a photograph of a man in Calley's platoon actually shooting someone. The Viet Cong could easily have been responsible for those deaths, because I've seen it happen so many times before in other hamlets we entered."[5]

Army officials refuse to release any photographs taken at My Lai, but have said that the criminal investigation division has no pictures "of people actually shooting or actually killing."[4]

After investigation conducted by Lieutenant General Hoang Xuan Lam, South Vietnamese commander of the area which includes Pinkville, the South Vietnamese government declared flatly that no massacre occurred. The declaration said civilian deaths in My Lai resulted from normal and unavoidable acts of war, and it placed the blame for civilian casualties on the Viet Cong. It characterized as "totally false" news stories that hundreds of civilians were killed.

The South Vietnamese government said that the Viet Cong had heavily fortified Song My village and had forced civilians to remain there against their will, as battle approached; that American troops, meeting heavy resistance, had to call in artillery and air strikes; and that total casualties (from artillery, air strikes, and ground fighting) were 20 civilians and 125 Viet Cong killed.[4]

On December 11, reporter James Boyle wrote, in the Washington *Evening Star*, that a subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee had heard testimony from a U.S. helicopter pilot (Hugh Thompson, Jr.) who said he trained his guns on U.S. soldiers, holding them at bay, while he rescued several wounded civilians from a ditch piled with bodies at My Lai on the day of

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the massacre. U. S. Representative L. Mendel Rivers, chairman of the committee, and two other members of the committee denied that any such testimony had been given. Rivers said that whoever gave out such a story "was a damn liar," and said the subcommittee had seen no evidence that a massacre had occurred at My Lai.[8]

Actually, Thompson (now an instructor pilot at Fort Rucker) received the Distinguished Flying Cross for saving the lives of Vietnamese civilians at My Lai on March 16, 1968. His citation read:

"He spotted 15 young children trying to hide in a bunker and evacuated them to a secure area. Moments later, he located a wounded Vietnamese child; and, disregarding his own safety, he again landed and evacuated the child to the Quangngai hospital."[9]

The "secure area" phrase in that citation means a place safe from the Viet Cong. Obviously, Thompson did not rescue civilians from bloodthirsty Americans bent on murder. He rescued them from the crossfire of battle in general, and the Viet Cong in particular.

The body count of civilian victims of the alleged American massacre at My Lai is enough to discredit the story as spurious. There are seldom, if ever, that many people in such a hamlet as My Lai.

Former Sergeant Deverick says:

"I've been through My Lai many times, and other hamlets in the area. There just weren't the number given in the news stories, and I can't remember an operation where there were so many people in one place."[5]

Furthermore, no graves of victims have been found at or near the scene of the "massacre," though diligent search has been made, not only by army investigators but also by reporters looking for a story.

It is a pity that the Nixon administration has not upheld the reputation of our troops in Vietnam as stoutly as the South Vietnamese government has upheld it.

I doubt that convictions will result from charges made against Americans at My Lai. Nonetheless, our troops in Vietnam have already been made scapegoats to assuage the Nixon administration's extreme sensitivity to the barbs of the liberal and pro-communist press, and to "world opinion."

Regardless of the outcome of the My Lai "massacre" case, the public should let the President, all members of Congress, and the members of our armed forces know that our fighting men still have the respect, admiration, confidence, and gratitude of the American people.

REMINDER

The first and only printing of Bound Volume XV of *The Dan Smoot Report*, containing the 52 issues published in 1969 (available for delivery in February), can be ordered between now and the end of January at the special pre-publication price of $9.00 (regular price $10.00).

FOOTNOTES

(1) Dallas *Times Herald*, Dec. 12, 1969, p. A4
(2) Dallas *Morning News*, Jan. 1, 1970, p. A8
(3) Dallas *Times Herald*, Dec. 17, 1969, p. A12, A50
(4) Houston *Chronicle*, Nov. 23, 1969, sect. 1, pp. 1, 15, 16
(5) Dallas *Times Herald*, Dec. 7, 1969, p. A27
(6) UPI story by H. D. Quigg, published Dec. 11, 1969
(7) Dallas *Morning News*, Dec. 12, 1969, p. A27
(8) *Congressonal Quarterly Weekly Report*, Dec. 19, 1969, p. 2648; Dallas *Times Herald*, Dec. 12, 1969, p. A4
(9) *Herald of Freedom*, Dec. 12, 1969

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